

# **Fidel Castro Gets Drunk After Every Battle**



**Philip E. Bowles**  
**the club**  
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Vermont nights are still as dark as a G minor, and the only thing my headlights showed through the dust as I reached the end of Anne's driveway was the back of a dark 7 series BMW with a Jesus fish where the model designation was supposed to be. Oh, shit. A lead sled built to ferry burgomasters and bankers in the rear seats, not an Ultimate Driving Machine. Could this really be the ride of the new boyfriend Luke, the Director of Photography from her last feature? He should be Luke the physician, I thought, with that fuddy-duddy doctor's car, and a damned Jesus freak to boot. At least he might be better company than the environmentalist.

Naturally, environmentalist had been a vegan, and Executive Director of some large national group of professional nags. He possessed the true imbecile's impatient moral certitude. Anne had said there were nine good reasons to keep him around, but I was glad to see him go. He was an angry tall bean of a man, overly opinionated and intolerant. One day he hit her. She gave him that smile of hers, said it had excited her, made her want to shake things up a little. Once she had the cuffs and ball gag on him, she worked over with a rubber hose for about a half an hour. Then she kicked him out, laughing when he said he would bring charges. The welts would fade within a day. She too had influential friends, and she did not have a wife and children, either. I mention this because it was so Anne. She never loses. Some people say getting to know someone, or ourselves, is like peeling back the layers of an onion, eventually getting to the real person inside. I demur. We have within us innumerable homunculi, pieces of who we might have been, who we might become, who we once were. These little fellows raise their heads form time to time. Anne has strangled her invisible invaders better than anybody I know. She persists.

Anne of a Thousand Days, I called her, because that was roughly the amount of time we had been together, or a couple, or whatever you want to call it. "Couple" was a word with fluid meaning for her.

"Malcolm says I am polyamorous, and I should take that as a gift" Malcolm Rothstein was her ancient Viennese shrink. The dirty old alligator probably just wanted to hear her stories.

"Hell, Eric, it's no different than my having lunch or a massage with the guy. Lighten up, cookie."

"Maybe you could try lunching where they don't have fish on the menu, or he could massage you somewhere else."

"Fuck you, wise guy." And a sweet smile.

The LA years. Maybe the Thousand Days would have lasted longer had we not been there. Neither one of us had much artistic pretention, despite our respective graduate degrees in drama and music; we wanted both fame and money. LA is where it seemed easiest to find. We had been friends for years before, from when we had our cabaret act as undergraduates. We had stayed friends; neither one of us had a close family, so were confidants, holiday companions, mutual crying shoulders.

Families. “Your father is playing a gig”, my mother would say. I have some early memories of when he was around, but then he was on tour in Europe, or doing session work, or any one of a thousand places my mother probably invented. He was a horn player of minor repute, and she lived and died as a night club tramp. Her parents had made some provision for an allowance for her, so I grew up in reasonable middle class respectability. When other men began to hang around the house, I became an angry young mulatto Telemachus, waiting for my father’s return. Eventually I learned to erase him. They tell me he lives in Denmark, and is reduced to taking humiliating gigs like playing sideman for the repulsive Billy Joel. I never met the grandparents, and income died with my mother. It made little difference. I had long since learned to live on my wits and my race, either one, as convenient.

Anne’s mother was a suicide; her father was some unknown teenage boyfriend. Abortion was unthinkable in her large Catholic family. Little Orphan Annie was passed around the siblings and cousins, an economic and moral burden, the product of mortal sin consequent on grave sin, and they felt they had to bear her. Like Grandma’s Christmas fruitcake, she said, something nobody wanted yet felt too guilty to discard. Later, as she gained celebrity, some of them tried to capitalize, and she brushed them off with a couple of headshots mailed by her agent.

That’s all we were, just brother/sister companions and artistic collaborators. I think of some of our friends from before, eking out livings by writing atonal string pieces for a handful of grey haired admirers, or directing another summer stock revival of Chekhov. Neither of us had seen any of those people for years.

Early in her career, Anne was happy to do commercials, or soaps, or crummy pictures; but nothing that would harm her reputation. She became known as a disciplined and cooperative character actor, a supporting actress, who never had fits or showed up on set late and loaded. She would help other cast members with dropped lines, improvising around their flubs the way a good sax player can, without thinking. She understands and respects the basis of the actor’s craft. Too many indolent artists don’t. David Thomson once grouped Anne with Karen Black, Barbara Hershey and Debra Winger. Anne took this badly, but like most of Thomson’s observations, it was accurate.

It didn’t hurt that she was, even for Hollywood, a notoriously light skirt, too. This is what brought the Thousand Days to an end. I suppose Anne is the woman I have come closest to loving. I am not that possessive, but the Thousand Days almost destroyed our friendship.

We spent those fifteen years out there, roped together like mountain climbers, and the industry was very kind to both of us. There were times she’d be on a long location job, or one of us might be involved with someone too jealous or too captivating. Then we might have a falling out, or just be out of touch for half a year. Old friendships survive those things the way a rubber boat glides over the jagged rocks of a rapid. I have never trusted anyone the way I trusted Anne (liaisons aside), and the feeling was mutual. I bought a place in Malibu with a small sound studio, did my film score and jingle writing, record producing, arranging. I had all the work I wanted, sometimes

more. Anne never bought a house out there, always just renting. And she rented pretty modest places, too. We are both careful with money, having come from none, although in those days she was far more of a cheapskate than me. These days...these days I am careful too. Anne is practical above all else. She said she never wanted to feel tied to LA. What she did buy was the place in Vermont, with her first big picture fee. All cash, no mortgage. It was her bolt-hole, a place to retreat to, where her modest celebrity was ignored politely by the neighbors.

I kept the place in Malibu, but the coke and the noise and the smells of LA were starting to get the better of me. I had enough money, and something felt like it was changing in the music industry. That turned out to be an understatement. So I took an easy gig at an Ivy League college, and moved East. The job gave me plenty of time to do any work I cared to on the side. I have always been happy to capitalize on the status granted by my half-breed genes. The college dopes considered me part of their “diversity” profile. To think that they would patronize and worship me the way they would some witless thug who yapped his crap before a pounding drum machine! I hold a Doctorate from the Berklee School of Music, for God’s sake! My Malibu connection, the Porsche, the Brioni jeans, my easy familiarity with famous names, all gave me a sort of louche exoticism around campus. Men and women with post doctorate degrees, theories named after them, academic giants; these all are pathetically impressed when they find out you hung out with some barely literate guitar player, or a song writer who had never studied meter. Really, they are as easy to fool as goats. Most of the students are decent types, with one exception. More about that later.

About a year later, Anne left LA for the house in Vermont. She could still do some work, but really didn’t need the money, and got tired of rejecting the stereotypical roles thrown at a woman her age. She had devoted her semi-retirement to ceramics, and built a studio in a shed on the property. She would toil there for hours, enthusiastically making cups, plates, vases, misshapen and ugly. I have seen woodworkers and music students with that ruinous mix of ardent incompetence. At least Anne did not want to make a living in ceramics. Whenever she broke up with somebody, she would go into her studio and throw all her creations on the floor. Maybe that’s why she made them in the first place.

The house was dark, Anne’s bedroom light was out; I let myself in quietly. Christ, no bourbon where it ought to be. Not even beer in the refrigerator. Could the Jesus freak be a tee-totaller too? Anne did not care for drink much one way or the other, but it was not like her to be like this. She is always thinking of others, that is part of her loveliness, and part of what made loving her impossible. The house had a horrible old Hamilton upright from a prior owner, the kind you rent for an untalented child, but she kept it in tune and with the action and felts in good shape, because she knew I needed to write on it some days. No booze. This *was* shaping up to be a weekend. I poured myself a stiff one from the emergency supply I keep in the car, plugged in the laptop, and finished the vocal arrangements I had promised a week ago.

The first light told my eyes it was time to waken, and my ears told me that Luke the Physician knew his anatomy and was not a vegetarian, at least. Anne is one of those girls who, shall we say, vocalizes a lot. It seems to have nothing to do with how much of a passionate nature they have, but some girls do, and some girls don't. There is something both erotic and theatrical about this overt noisiness, but also something that made me feel like an object. I had endured not a few sidelong glances at hotels, and weekend houses where we had stayed during the Thousand Days.

I was on my second cup of coffee when Luke came downstairs. Big athletic blonde guy with long hair and a slight Texas drawl. Younger, by about ten years. I could see him as a baseball player. Introductions made, he had an easy, open manner and went back upstairs to bring Anne a cup of coffee. I did not sense any of the Jesus freak/teetotaler superiority or condescension I had expected. In fact I had wanted to dislike him on those accounts, but he seemed so cheerful and attractive I just didn't have it in me.

Scrapple is what Anne cooked us for breakfast, some dark shadow from her Philadelphia upbringing. Over the years I had acquired a tolerance for the greasy stuff, and poor Luke looked as though he would make a game attempt to enjoy it.

"Did you see Luke's new car? It's *fast*."

"It was pretty late when I arrived"

"It's a car I always wanted, a 740i, the V-12. I got it from a doctor in my AA group. He lost his license from dipping into the anesthetics. Then he found Jesus, who I suppose is a safer anesthetic. I only bought the car last month, but I kept the Jesus fish on there thinking it might help me out of a ticket. But it's starting to embarrass me, and I think I'll take it off this weekend, and fill the holes in the trunk."

"You don't like Jesus?" seeing if I could josh him a little.

"Jesus is just all right with me. I just don't want him on my sleeve. Or my car."

"How long have you been doing the AA ting?" I have plenty of friends who have taken that cure, and have nothing against it. It's just not my thing.

"A year this weekend, actually. Seems I liked Mr. Jack, and a whole lot of other things, more than they liked me. Especially when work started to go away".

"You're still shooting regularly, aren't you?"

"No like the old days, at least in the past few years. God damned digital capture, it's enough to drive a man to drink" A charming smile.

"Tell me about it"

We fell into an easy conversation that lasted through and after breakfast, him griping about the new world of computerized production, me grouching about how sampling and post production enhancements had ruined creativity. Bad voices sounded good. Fat actors looked slim.

Arrangements I wrote were showing up in work I was never paid for. Scenes he shot were relit in post to the point of unrecognizability. Nobody wanted to pay for quality any more. Just a couple of too-soon obsolete guys swapping war stories, but without a lot of bitterness and whining. We had been treated well by The Industry, and if we did not want to have to go to MIT to learn how to keep up, well that was just the way it was going to be. I never held any sympathy for the men who used to work in the shuttered factories in the New England countryside. If they could not adapt, or if they had not saved anything during the years when they had those “good, Union jobs” making now useless crap like TV antennas, fuck them. Luke had come from a west Texas town where there was football, cotton farming, and nothing else. “Just not big enough, dumb enough, or mean enough for football” he said, although I judged he’d certainly had the body of an all-pro wide receiver, at least back then. “I played in the band.” he said. “I had to go to the Baptist church and there was music there, too. My momma was proud we weren’t in the other church, the Nazarenes. ‘There’s no white person more stupider’, she used to say, *than a Naz-a-reen.*” Anne joined in on this last. It must have been a joke they had shared before. “Anyway, music got me a ticket out of there, a scholarship to TSU.”

“Ever do anything with it?”

“Got laid a lot when I played in a band, Luke and the Apostles. I was the leader because I could sing a little, and because I was the only one who could read music. Most of us kids back in the church choir could not read much else, but we did learn how to do that. I guess I could have done something more with music, but that life looked too uncertain. I had seen enough uncertainty with the cotton farmers, and what it did to them. It didn’t make them plan better, it made them hate, and whine. Hate their God for his bad weather, and whine for money when their crops failed. Then pay off debts in a good year, buy a new truck or tractor on time, and feel no gratitude or generosity for their good fortune. No, sir. No place for me. I liked movies, and photography, and there were decent jobs right out of school. A PA made fifty bucks a day, and there were chances to move up the ladder. The other guys on the crew though I was a sort of funny hayseed, and the old Jews in production liked my work ethic. Which was basically agreeing to shoot anything for them for a lower day rate than some other guy.”

“Still play?”

“A little, just for fun. I used to be able to play sax, and keyboards, but now I just fart around on the guitar a little. Blues, simple stuff. I have a dobro.”

Maybe Anne had found a good one, I hoped. I was beginning to like the guy, partly because he and Anne were obviously crazy about each other, partly because he seemed honest and straightforward, and partly because he was so damned good looking. Attractive people have an easier time in life. I always wondered how just a few horrible, hairy little schlubs found great

success with women. Most didn't but some did. It must be because they are so horny. More things I will never understand about women.

"Luke has a beautiful ranch in Templeton, and we can go horseback riding." The Templeton scene is largely high level technicians, cameramen, sound engineers, editors. Close enough to LA to be convenient, but even further away than Santa Barbara. My tastes still leaned toward Malibu. But I saw the appeal.

"You seem pretty young to retire to a horse farm."

"You're right, there's still stuff I want to shoot, pictures, documentaries even. I just can't get the sound stage out of my blood. Maybe being sober makes it easier to think of facing the bullshit again. Being in New York instead of LA is a big help. I can still shoot commercials to pay the bills."

After breakfast, Luke drove into town to get some paint and Bondo for his car, and I made a few desultory passes on the piano. Anne came and sat on the bench next to me. "Well, what do you think?" We had always had a little fun deconstructing her relationships, from the celebrity chef ("prick with a fork") to the Frenchman ("foreign object which should be kept out of orifices") to the Rastafarian ("Jamacian jerk"). The breakups would end in tears, and recriminations, and Anne sobbing on the telephone or on my shoulder. It was part of my function.

"Sweetie, I just met the guy, but he strikes me as a possible keeper. Sounds like he knows what he's doing." With this last, I managed to make her blush, which was a small victory. She's beautiful with a flushed face, and it had been a long time since I had seen her with one made the proper way.

They spent the afternoon picking up dinner at the roadside stands all the local farmers seemed to be running, and generally doing all the things the tourist board expected visitors to do. I was happy enough to be alone pottering around the house, working on a few charts, and making a run to Bennington where I could get some booze and a few decent bottles of wine for dinner.

I broiled the quail they brought home, and I braised their fresh grapes in some rosemary and demi-glace with a side of polenta. Anne is completely clueless about cooking, she has no instinct for it, and Luke appeared to be the typical single guy who appreciates good food but does not care to cook.

Up there, Anne and I would usually play a little music after dinner, typically the cabaret piano material we did back in college. When instead she asked Luke to play a little guitar music, my chest tightened. Jealousy, yeah. A break in a routine, yeah. These things upset me. And now I was going to have to listen to another guy play something, badly, in an open tuning. Sometimes friends imagined their kids had musical talent, and wanted me to give them advice about a music career. If they played a guitar I almost always told them to play in open tunings. I figured that way, at least

one chord was already made for them, provided they knew how to tune the instrument. It made the recital slightly less unpleasant.

Don't get me wrong, there are guitar masters out there who play open, like the slack-key master Peter Lombardi. One of the best session men alive. He would only agree to leave his massive Hawaiian bungalow/ man-cave—Bloomfield, he calls it, for no apparent reason—if we chartered a plane for him. He has a studio there, and expects everybody else to come to him, even though there is nowhere to stay near sweaty Hilo. But nobody else sounds like him. The more difficult and eccentric he becomes, the more the producers and rock stars want him on their albums. I don't suppose he works more than twenty days a year, yet he lives better than most of the guys I hired.

I liked Luke, and even though Anne had hurt my feelings a little, decided to be a good sport. What came out of his guitar case gave me chills. A National Steel, Model N, or maybe an O with a reset round block neck. 14 frets, tricone resonators, slotted peg-head. If there were five of these in existence, to say nothing of in shape to be played, I would be amazed.

“Could I see that a minute?”

He handed it to me. A Model 4.

“You know what this is...”

A little pissed, thinking I was taking him for an ignoramus: “Yeah, I know. It's kind of crazy for me to own something like this, but I had no idea what I was buying, and the guy selling it had no idea of what he was selling. From 'way back in my band days. I call it the Axe of the Apostle. We mostly played all electric anyway. No matter how hard up I got, I could never bear to sell it.”

He tuned it easily, unassisted, knowing where 440 was, second nature, in that same automatic way a great bartender or outfielder works, with a natural grace. The 14 fret neck played clear and in tune all the way up the fretboard. Unbelievable, for an instrument of this age.

Luke started in on a little shuffle beat that quickly became a cover of Waits' “Get Behind the Mule”. But not a cover; it was so sly, so sure, so seductive he took the song in a way that Waits himself never could have, past the Gothic and sometimes overblown darkness of his material into a jungle sound, the kind of song that made parents in the 1950's fearful of Negro Music. His syncopation had just enough looseness and defect to make it unbearably sexy. That sense of rhythm is purely instinctual, and one of the reasons why so few white people can play blues effectively.

“Damn, white boy, you does knows how to play dat thang.” When he had finished.

Anne was smiling at me, as if to say, “See, I wouldn't try to stick you with some dummy.” When I retrieved my old Washburn from my car, Luke said “that's a Model 5259, isn't it?” which was



correct. Not exactly something you'd expect an amateur, or even most collectors, to notice right away.

"Why is it that I have to fall in love with a couple of guys who have Guitar Asperger's?" joked Anne, who never paid attention to such things. She hardly remembers the model of car she owns. Luke said he'd always been able to remember stuff like camera filter sizes and the bulb designation for every light, it just came to him. It made life seem more orderly, as the same gift has done for me, as well. It's like the way I can transcribe for different instruments, almost instantly. I wonder if I had not been exposed to music or hadn't had an education, I might have worked as a pharmacist, knowing every pill in every dosage on every shelf their white plastic bottles shining in endless fluorescent sun, and even the ones we didn't have but which were listed in the Physician's Desk Reference.

"Eric, sweetie, print out some music for us." Anne could not read music, but she wanted the lyrics. When we first began, I tried to teach her the rudiments of music theory, hoping she could learn to sight read, or even follow a chart. It was about as successful as trying to teach a woman how to read a map. Those were the only real fights we ever had. Bees, swine, and women cannot be turned.

"Tablature or sheet?" I asked Luke, inwardly cruelly, thinking, or hoping, he could not play from notation. A little competitive defiance in him, answering "Your call."

I excused myself for a few minutes to go back to the computer and work out a few 3 part arrangements, transcribing fiddle or banjo parts for the dobro, the male vocal lines for tenor and baritone. Especially in three parts, the vocal harmonies for the rural American forms have to be tense and argumentative, unless you want to sound like Roy Rodgers or the Statler Brothers. I knew Anne would not follow a chart, but she knew what to do anyway.

We started with the Louvin Brothers' "I Don't Believe You've Met My Baby", a duet Anne and I had enjoyed together for years. I left out a vocal part for Luke, but his dobro work slithered up and down the fretboard, doing everything the mandolin might have done, but smearing the sound with the right sort of smoky, mountain, aura that the often too jolly, even decorative, mandolin cannot express. I've always loved this Appalachian cracker white music, and the better country stuff. I am half white, after all, and those mountain folk were the niggers of their time anyway.

Annes' voice was a natural mezzosoprano and she carried the countertenor like the ghost of Ira Louvin, soaring in and out of the verses perfectly, accurately, like a little bat. She has one of those rare natural singers' voices that is not just pitch perfect, but has the gift of phrasing and timing that cannot be taught. I have worked with very, very few natural singers, and I know Anne's gift is one of genius. Had she studied, had she wanted that more than the money and the power that comes from acting, she probably would have been far more acclaimed critically. She is a successful actress, a star even; but as a singer, she would have been a legend. I could never get her into the recording studio, and on the few occasions when I tried to record something, she tightened up and lost just a fraction of the loose, supple tubular sound the diaphragm and throat of a great singer

know how to make. Strange, for an actress. But I could have cured her of that with a little work. I've done it many times before. But she did nothing with it, never singing even once on screen. She had been given the gift. Her DNA must carry an immortality, the songs choked out of the dusty broken lungs of some unknown scots-Irish coal miner, one with the gift of song and genius, gone deaf and mad and ruined in the darkness there.

The rest of the evening went on like that, in a luminous haze a recording might have missed. Perhaps some mummy's curse would have befallen me if I had recorded it; it was too good. Perhaps performing that night was itself a curse because it changed so much. I consider myself to have a decent tenor, and Luke's easy baritone rode along with Anne and me through "Baby, Ride Easy", "You Done Me Wrong", "Killing the Blues", "Wayfaring Stranger", "Don't Let Me Cross Over", "This Old House", "I'll Fly Away", and finally "Louisiana Woman/Mississippi Man" another old favorite of Anne's and mine, with Luke and I alternating the male verses. With a simple glance between us he could shift to the high baritone part, or I could cover the lower range, and neither of us had to think about it. Luke and I played and sang together like two who had accompanied each other for decades. There is a knowing when you play well with someone else, a choreographed dogfight in which the planes never collide, but which is not entirely friendly, either. Group improvisation, and improvising around written material is a natural contradiction in terms. And that is why when it works, it works so well. Everyone has equal pleasure, consideration of the others, and the whole enterprise become an organism much greater than the sum of its parts. You are always playing at the crumbled edge of catastrophe, when improvisation turns into chaos. The chromatic scales and all the conventions of musical notation give limitless creative room in group improvisation, but at the same time place safe limits and iron rules to keep the entire performance afloat. Luke played a beautiful solo version of Golden Rocket, Anne and I finished up with a few old cabaret numbers, because Luke asked us to. I could see she was feeling frisky and ready for bed.

I put my earplugs in this night. I usually fall asleep fast, moving seamlessly into dreams and solid sleep. No matter what is going on in or around me, I have always been able to find the little cave of sleep. That night I was simply too energized, I did not *want* to sleep, kicked the sheets, fell into and out of a light sleep, and finally gave up around 5 AM. I kept thinking of that National Steel. I had to look at it, hold it, smell it. I knew I couldn't play it without waking Anne and Luke, but I went downstairs and took it out of its case. There is a cohesiveness and elegance to the design; flashy, of course, but with an aesthetic balance rarely seen in instruments made for playing popular music. The chrysanthemums entwine around the front and back, the fret board has tasteful, but not excessive inlays, unlike my Washburn, which was a little over the top in that regard. I needed to feel the slide round my finger, and opened the storage section in the nicely battered case. In addition to the slide, a capo, and a few picks, there was a black leather bag that looked like a pipe tobacco pouch. I opened it. I needed to touch and see everything, know more about him.

There are times we open doors and see things we wish we could forget, times we wish we could hit "rewind" and tell the engineers to get ready for another take. This was one of those. I knew I had

crawled like a burglar into another person's room. I had not intended to steal, but I had stolen, this time a secret. A neat little package of China White, unopened, and a baggie full of sterile syringes. The two red lions winked at me.

Some recovered alcoholics just keep a few bottles around the house to prove to themselves that they don't need it, I told myself. Could be. Or not. I put everything back, went upstairs, and slept solidly until 8.

Let me tell you about addiction, which runs in my business. I saw my mother, saw her sick at breakfast time sucking down the brown and oily poison Sharon Olds' father drank, and how it made her laugh or cry, or sleep. I have always skated around the cusp of that volcano, never quite falling in. I drink too much, especially now when it really doesn't matter any more. But when it did matter, there was always a guardrail, or a chickenshit gene, a switch that tripped and said "enough". Real addicts always lie. They say they've licked it, and a few of them do. But even those still want it, and lie to themselves and to the rest of us about their cure. Lying is a big part of life, we all do it, and in its milder iterations it's considered courteous. Some people lie to their psychiatrists, which has always struck me as particularly droll and pointless.

Sunday afternoon, Anne and I watched Luke leave for New York. I did not have to leave until Monday morning. Anne seemed so happy and relaxed, I could not tell her about the guitar case. It was like having to tell a little kid on his birthday that his puppy had distemper and was going to die. There had to be a better time, I told myself. I gave her a goodnight kiss, and she kissed me back in a way that was not exactly sisterly. Every time I think I know her, she does something surprising. We spent that night in her bed, with the smells and tastes of Anne and Luke all around us. She wanted it that way, and she always gets the things she wants. That was the first and last time since the Thousand Days that we had been lovers. As we went to sleep, she said, "Eric, I think I'm falling in love with Luke."

"So do I."

We never lied to each other.

Sometime I wonder if I had not begun to court disaster after that. With Carol, I broke my diopter rule. Never share a bed with a woman who can not share your reading glasses. It is a formula for catastrophe. On top of that, she was married, and my student. Yes, I am an idiot. She was younger, attractive, obviously interested, and it flattered me. The fact that I was risking my job, not that I really needed it, added a soupçon of excitement to the situation. For God's sake, she was thirty years old, not a child, and what business was it of the University's if we cared to act as consenting adults? I am not one of those fools who need a younger woman to feel powerful and sexy. I like the way women age, the character that their faces and eyes develop, the sweet catenary curves of their breasts and bottoms. Women get more worldly, less hysterical with age; at least the good ones do. Carol had classical training as singer, but decided, wisely, on an academic and critical career.

She wore her learning on her sleeve a little too much, but I enjoyed her wit, and musical understanding.

About a month into things, I took Carol up to Vermont to meet Anne and Luke. I suppose I had built things up more than I ought to, because Carol was nervous and defensive when we arrived. She had been excited initially, and I had told her enough that she should not have felt jealous. Anne and Carol took an instant dislike to one another. Luke tried to be as agreeable as he could, but as I watched Carol looking at him, and Anne looking at the two of them, I could see that this had the makings of a very bad weekend.

Luke was using. I have developed a better eye than most narcs have. I can read the disparate and often unique tells. The jittery filthy street junkie is the thing of 1950's juvenile delinquent films. Clean heroin, dosed correctly and administered in sterile needles, is a congenial drug used undetected by countless high-performing individuals all around the world. But over time, it makes users, while not as obnoxious as habitual drunks, poor company. They function in their own interior world, the heroin world, where life is just too good to leave to talk to the rest of us. If a musician can control his habit, and maintain enough financial stability to use heroin sensibly, he can play at a very fine level for decades. Musicians already live in their own world anyway. I don't think Anne knew, or wanted to know. Astonishingly, she seemed to treat Luke's disengagement as a rejection of her. Women always want to see things we do as a reflection on them.

Dinner was not too unpleasant, especially as I had enough to drink. Since I had written a very fine arrangement of "Hello Stranger" just for the occasion, two women's voices, guitar and dobro, I insisted we play it afterwards. Everything went wrong. Like one of those ghastly hot tub parties you hear about, nobody seemed to know what to do. Things like that just end in embarrassment and dissatisfaction. Carol knew how to read, of course, but still missed a few notes. She would never approach Anne's gift of phrase and timing.

We gave up early. As I went upstairs, Anne said to me, loud enough for Carol to hear, "Tell your bitch to learn that when the chart says A flat, sing a fucking A flat." Those are the last words I ever heard her say. Carol and I left early, before breakfast.

## Part 2 Tangier

It hadn't worked out. With Carol. After our disastrous weekend in Vermont, things got more argumentative, and she started drinking, hard. Her husband did not want her back. She thought she was pregnant. (Wrong.) I wondered what I had been thinking. We left a bar one night and the car crashed. Really, nobody knew who had been driving.

What would you have done in my place? My Washburn was in that car, and Carol was dead. I missed the Washburn more. The Middletown DA was an ambitious little prick and wanted to bag a head for vehicular manslaughter. He tried to paint me as some sort of celebrity Svengali, luring a poor student astray. It took me a lot of lawyering up and a good part of my savings, plus the house

in Malibu, to tie up the loose ends. The girl was dead anyway, we were both hammered out of our minds. Nobody else was hurt. Could have been either one of us, really; me dead and her on trial. What would have been the point of locking me away for God knows how long just so the ambitious DA could have a wall trophy? So I won, won the only way I could, with my lawyers bringing out the abortions, the mental illnesses, the whole fucked up history of Carol's metastasizing torrent of bad life decisions that did not end until she did.

Both before and after the trial, I took the lawyers' advice and laid low. Tangier is an amenable place, and the expats here consider it witty and profound when I look out onto the Med and say it all comes back to middle sea. I've been following up some on the work Paul Bowles did with the native music, and, yes, with the native boys once in a while. Life is easy, and the circle of fifths might describe what is around my living room these days. Not much work. Anne has had a bit of a late-career resurgence in Brazil, of all places, where she has become a TV star. I read about her in the industry press, and in the mainstream papers once in a while. Today I read that she and Luke were married in Vermont.

A private ceremony, with only family and friends.



This story is dedicated to the memory of Stuart Graham, a man who knew about both life and music, and was thanked very little for any of it.